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ABSTRACT

Although linguistic analysis is only indirectly useful for language teaching, it is directly useful to the language teacher. What language teachers hope to gain from linguistic studies are insights into the language and how it works and functions, so that they can make use of this information when formulating teaching techniques. With this knowledge, a teacher can look for the best possible ways for a language student to progress in language learning to the point where he can comprehend most of what he hears and reads in the foreign language, and can produce meaningful sentences in any situation when he speaks or writes the foreign language. Included is a brief general discussion of the language system--phonology, morphology, and syntax--followed by examples illustrating the distinctive features of the French language in each of these areas. Particular attention is paid to the verbal system. Suggestions are made for classroom application and strategy. "In the foreign language classroom the presentation of material should encourage the formation of rules for the whole system of the language rather than the memorization of items. The student should be encouraged to take an active part in the formation of the rules for the language he is learning." (Author/HW)

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Linguistics and the Teaching of French - What are the Practical Applications?

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Linguistics and the Teaching of French - What are the Practical Applications?

The past few years have shown considerable changes in the status of foreign languages and foreign language teaching in the United States. Colleges and universities are dropping foreign language entrance and graduation requirements. FLES programs are being phased out of the elementary school programs for budgetary reasons. Junior and senior high schools are seeing drops in foreign language enrollments. Methods of teaching foreign languages, and particularly the audio-lingual method, are under fire, not only from the psychologists dealing with learning theories, but also from classroom teachers. The students are restless, too, demanding programs and courses that are relevant for them in the 1970's. Educators are talking about such things as an integrated day; modular scheduling; integrated curricula; student rights; individualized instruction; behavioral objectives; dropout prevention; master teachers and differentiated staffing; accountability; and efficiency.

No one will or can deny that problems do exist in American education today. We certainly cannot deny that the status of foreign languages and the rational for teaching foreign languages in American elementary and secondary schools, and universities is in trouble. What we need to do as foreign language teachers and educators is to try

to find out why attitudes about foreign languages have changed and what, as teachers, we can do to improve the situation of foreign languages in the curriculum. One of the best places to begin is right in the classroom, and not only in the classroom, but in the preparation of teachers before they go into the classroom.

For those among you who participated in the NDEA or EPDA Institutes of the 60's you may remember a class called Linguistics for French Teachers, or Linguistics Applied to the Teaching of French, or simply Applied Linguistics. Your memory about the class may be rather hazy, perhaps because the teacher put countless formulae on the blackboard that looked like algebraic equations. These were obviously understood by the teacher, but his audience did not comprehend what these 'equations' had to do with the teaching of the French language in the classroom, since it was never clearly explained. After the Institute was over you asked yourself what practical applications could the linguistics course have had for the teaching of French? If any? What could you have discovered from linguistics that would have helped you improve your teaching, your students' motivation and the learning that was going on in the classroom?

On the other hand, the experience you had with the applied linguistics course may have been quite different. Perhaps you learned a great deal about the French language, its parts and how they function together. Perhaps you discussed how French differed from English and the areas of

special difficulties a native speaker of English would have learning French, and, from these discussions and exchanges of ideas you gained insights into both languages that you had not had before, and you learned how your classroom presentations and student activities could be changed to bring about better learning. Even though you did not directly use all the information gained in the linguistics course in your classroom, you did use it as a guide as to what to do in the classroom. It was obvious to you that a description of a language and how it works is not in itself a set of directions as to how to learn or teach the language; that this description of French did not tell you how to go about teaching the materials, but enabled you to organize the materials you teach according to the rules of the system of the grammar and to formulate new teaching techniques. Perhaps you were lucky. You were able to see that linguistics does have a great deal to offer language teachers.

What is learning a language all about, and particularly, what is learning a language other than your own native language all about? For most people, talking is an everyday activity, engaged in freely and extensively by almost every member of a society. It is carried on with the minimum of concentration, usually with none at all on its mechanism. We, as native speakers of English, have the patterns of the English language deeply imbedded in our minds. When we try to learn another language system we have to set aside the

mechanisms of our native language and with a maximum of concentration and conscious attention learn the system of the foreign language - not an easy task as there is bound to be constant interference from our native language habits.

When you learn a language you are learning the fundamental syntactical or grammatical relationships and processes of the language, i.e., the grammar of the language. Grammar controls the way we put words together into sentences, but grammar is not concerned simply with words, but also with certain groups of words. We generally don't think of compound or complex sentences as made up directly of words, but rather as made up of phrases and clauses, which in turn are composed of words. Some words can be divided into parts with which grammar must be concerned. In English, for example, past tense verbs have their suffixes, plural nouns have suffixes, verbs can be made by adding -ize to certain adjectives or nouns, or nouns can be made by adding -ness to adjectives. All these are facts of grammar. The real units of grammar, therefore, are often smaller than words, though some words have only one such unit. The linguist calls these pieces 'morphemes.'

Grammar, then, is the system built upon the morphemes and their relationships. It comprises the patterns by which morphemes are built into words, and the kinds of words that result; the patterns by which words are built into phrases

and the kinds of phrases, and so upward through many groups.

Another system in language has to do with the sounds that we use when we speak. It is known among linguistis as 'phonology'. We commonly think of the sounds of the language as of two kinds, consonants and vowels. But there are also features such as stress and intonation. All these together constitute the phonology.

The phonemes (the speech sounds) go together to form syllables. The syllables are put together to form what we might call 'words', since they are commonly identical with the words composed of morphemes and described in the grammar. The words of the sound system go together to form breath groups and various other larger units.

None of this 'going together' is haphazard. The patterns are fairly definite, regular, and characteristic of a particular language. Ask a French child to recite some utter nonsense and listen carefully. Even though you realize that the sounds you are hearing don't make any sense and don't have any meaning, you do recognize them to be French sounds, and sounds put together in much the same way as they would be in nnrmal French sentences. They must be, because the French child knows no other language patterns and these French language patterns are so deeply engraved in his mind that he cannot easily escape their control.

Not only does a language have both a phonological system and a grammatical system, but there is also a third system called <u>semantics</u>, a system of meaning. A sentence

not only has a pronunciation and a grammatical structure, it also has a meaning. Part of what is called meaning can be defined by observing situations in which the sentence is used. Another part of meaning is organized within the language itself. There are patterns of distinctions which a language forces its speakers to make. For example, whenever a French noun is spoken it must be assigned to either singular or plural, and to either masculine or feminine categories. Every word that modifies a particular noun must be assigned the same pattern of that noun, i.e., singular or plural, masculine or feminine. These are all parts of the semantic system. And like the phonological system and the grammatical system, the semantic system a person knows and uses is characteristically that of his own language.

The three systems, phonology, grammar, and semantics, interact with each other in complicated ways. Since every sentence must conform to the patterns of all three, then each sentence illustrates the three systems simultaneously. These three systems find their audible expression in one sequence of sounds. By taking a close look at a language and its various systems, one can readily see that language is indeed a most intricate and complicated system of human behavior.

As a language teacher, you should know and understand how the system of the language you are teaching operates. Hopefully, you will have this information before entering the classroom because the college or university program for

language teacher certification requires a course in language analysis which deals with the phonology, morphology and syntax of the foreign language and the comparison of these elements with American English. And, in turn, this knowledge about the language system and how it works can be used by the teacher as a basis for a sound pedagogical organization of his presentation of the foreign language to his students in the classroom.

My aim today is not to discuss a particular description of the French language, nor a particular grammatical theory or a particular psychology of learning theory, but rather to discuss some insights or information that can be gained from linguistic analysis that may be useful to the teacher.

As I previously stated, learning a language other than the native language must be carried on with conscious attention and concentration on the mechanisms of that language. A language learner will need to be able to recognize the phonological distinctions made by the speakers of the language being learned (the target language) and to produce recognizable distinctions. The younger the student, the more the reliance there should be on imitation of a good language model. With older students explanations of the physical production of a particular sound may be helpful and useful. The production of the French sound [y] is one of the hardest for English speakers to pronounce since it does not exist in the English phonological system. Learning the position of the mouth, lips and tongue in the production

of the sound [y] may be helpful to the student in his effort to imitate this sound.

When a student pronounces the French word O PÉ RA TION as OP ÉR A TION; PA RENTS as PAR ENTS; SÉ NA TEUR as SÉN A TEUR he is transferring the English closed syllable system to French. By closed syllable is meant that the syllable ends with a consonant. In French, the syllables tend to end with a vowel, i.e., open syllables. It will be necessary to make students aware of this difference in order to have them pronounce words, and especially cognates, à la française. This can be demonstrated to students by dividing an English sentence into syllables and pointing out that English syllables tend to end with a consonant. Then contrast the English closed syllable pattern with the French open syllable pattern by using the equivalent French sentence, emphasizing the sounds the student hears at the end of the syllable, rather than the letters he sees. (Figure 1)

FIGURE 1 0 - open syllable C - closed syllable

C	C	0	C	C	C	C	C
There/	is/	the/	house/	that/	Jack/	had/	built./

0	0	0	0	0	0	C	0	0	0	C
Voi/	là/	la/	mai/	son/	que/	Jacques/	a/	fait/	con/	struire./

Even if a syllable ends in a consonant sound, a Frenchman will tend to pronounce this consonant at the beginning of the next syllable, rather than at the end of the syllable in which it stands. (Figure 2)

FIGURE 2 Il est allé voir un film italien.

I / l_es/ t_allé/ voi/ r_un/ fil/ m_italien.

This can also be demonstrated by taking an English sentence and pronouncing it à la française. (Figure 3)

FIGURE 3

I ate an egg at eight.

I/ a/ te_a/ n_e/ gg_a/ t_eight.

In English there are two basic types of syllable boundaries, one between syllables of the same word and the other between syllables of different words (the/Con/sti/tu/tion/ of/ the/ U/ni/ted/ States). In any English word of two or more syllables, one syllable is stressed more heavily than others (CON STI TU TION). It is not always possible to predict in English which syllable is stressed, because the stress can be moved from one syllable to another as in the words PER MIT and PER MIT; CON DUCT and CON DUCT. In English the boundaries between words are generally well marked off in speech because of this kind of stress or accent and because of the syllable boundaries between words (juncture).

In French stress is based on groups of syllables called 'groupes rhythmiques', rather than on a word or group of words as it is in English. Therefore, there are no syllable boundaries in French which correlate with word boundaries. The nature of the stress itself is also different. In French, the stress is one of duration, that is, all the syllables in a 'groupe rhythmique' are of equal length except the last

syllable of the group, which is generally twice as long as the other syllables. In English, the stress is one of intensity, of which there are four levels from the strongest to the weakest.

Obviously, one of the major problems for the speaker of English learning to speak French is to unlearn his English stressing and syllabification habits - not an easy task. The teacher can help the student by pointing out the differences between the English and French phonological systems, so that the student will be consciously aware of these differences when he is speaking French.

When dealing with the sentence structure of a language we are concerned with the sentence's parts (the morphology) and how these parts are ordered and put together, which is generally referred to as syntax. English and French depend on a set system of ordering the sentence parts to convey meaning. The underlying principle of word order in the formation of English and French declarative sentences is the same; both languages use the order SUBJECT-VERB-OBJECT. (Fig. 4-A) If we examine the SUBJECT, VERB, and OBJECT portions of the English and French declarative sentences in Figures 4-B and 4-C, we can see that there are a considerable number of differences visible within each group. The system is obviously more complicated on the surface than the simple underlying SUBJECT-VERB-OBJECT order. It is within these complications that arise learning difficulties from one language system to another.

FIGURE 4-A

SUBJECT	VERB	OBJECT
Intelligent female students /	don't like /	wine.
SUBJECT	VERB	OBJECT
Les étudiantes intelligentes /	n'aiment pas /	le vin.

FIGURE 4-B

S V O
Intelligent female students/don't like/ wine.

SUBJECT - (adjective) + (adjective feminine) +(noun + plural)

VERB - (negative + verb + time)

OBJECT - (noun + singular)

FIGURE 4-C

S V O
Les étudiantes intelligentes/ n'aiment pas/ le vin.

SUBJECT - (determiner [the,a] + plural) + (noun + feminine + plural)+ (adjective + feminine + plural)

VERB - (negative + verb + person + tense + negative)

OBJECT - (determiner + masculine + singular) + (noun + singular)

The categories singular/plural are familiar to us in English. They are compulsory in nearly all our nouns (woman/women; cat/cats; dog/dogs; dish/dishes) in some of our pronouns (he/they; him/them; I/we) and in two noun modifiers (this/these; that/those).

Nouns in French are also categorized by number (le vin/les vins; l'étudiante/les étudiantes) as are most of the pronouns (tu/vous; je/nous; le mien/les miens; celui/ceux; le/les). However, if we look at the noun modifiers in both

the English and French sentences in Figure 4-A, we can see that in French noun modifiers agree in number (les; intelligentes) with the noun they are modifying. English noun modifiers do not agree. (intelligent; female).

All French nouns are also categorized by gender (masculine or feminine), whereas English nouns generally are not categorized by gender. Gender of nouns in English shows up mainly in the selection of noun substitutes such as 'the man'-'he'; 'the woman'-'she'; 'the table' - 'it'. In the English sentence Intelligent students don't like wine the only way the gender can be specified is by adding the adjective female preceding the noun.

Because English-speaking students are not accustomed to having to distinguish gender with nouns, they will have to be sensitized from the beginning of their study of French with the concept masculine-feminine in both oral and written work. The teacher should point out to his students that sometimes this difference in gender can be heard (les étudiantes intelligentes), and sometimes they will not be able to hear the difference. Students should be taught to look and to listen for both gender and number cues such as LE, LA, LES: MON, MA, MES: CE, CETTE, CES: DU, DE LA, DES.

Your students will also have to see that in French, nouns must generally appear with some sort of determiner, (e.g., the definite or indefinite article, or other modifying element), whereas in English, nouns do not necessarily need a determiner (le vin; wine) Your students will also have to

realize that the placement of certain words differs from one language to another; descriptive adjectives generally follow the noun they modify in French; in English they precede the noun (intelligent students / les étudiantes intelligentes).

Both French and English make use of the category human/non-human (persons/things) when dealing with the interrogative pronoun forms (see Figure 5).

FIGURE 5

Whom did you see?	Qui avez-vous vu?
Who came?	Qui est venu?
What happened?	Qu'est-ce qui est arrivé?
What are you doing?	Que faites-vous?

Students must be particularly aware of the distinction human/non-human when deciding which French pronoun to use in place of the noun in certain constructions (see Figure 6).

FIGURE 6

I often think about Mary.	Je pense souvent à Marie.
I often think about her.	Je pense souvent à elle.
I often think about the test.	Je pense souvent à l'examen.
I often think about it.	J'y pense.
I remember her.	Je me souviens d'elle.
I remember it.	Je m'en souviens.

Figure 7 represents a set of English and French prepositions used to express spatial relationships. Both English and French distinguish between relations that indicate the 'exterior' of something and those that indicate the 'interior'

of something, and both languages have a preposition that indicates an unmarked or neutral zone, indicating neither exterior nor interior relationships. Notice, however, that French makes no difference between an existing or static condition and an 'ending point' or 'approach' relationship. In English we have this contrast expressed by the prepositions on/onto; at/ to; and in/into, whereas in French there is no contrast and only the one set of prepositions marked for exteriority, interiority, and neutrality (sur, à, and dans). If the student understands these differences it will help him avoid errors such as "Je suis* dans la campagne" for "Je suis à la campagne"; "Je suis* dans les montagnes" for "Je suis aux montagnes".

The teaching of the verbal system is one of the chief problems for the French teacher. Not only is the concept of conjugational endings difficult for the speaker of English, but the irregular patterns of the verb make the French verbal system rather complicated. These complications are seen more readily in the written language than they are heard in the spoken language.

By analyzing the French verbal system we can see that pedagogically it is important to start the teaching of the verb with a basic form from which other forms can be derived and to break the verb into two elements, one element that carries the semantic meaning (root or base) and another that carries the grammatical meaning, i.e., the tense and/or person.

FIGURE 7

English and French Spatial Relations as Expressed by Prepositions [1]

		EXISTING CONDITION	APPROACH OR ENDING POINT	DEPARTURE OR STARTING POINT
I. EXTERIOR	(Engl.)	on	onto	off
	(Fr.)	SUR		DE
II. NEUTRAL		at	to	from
		À		DE
III. INTERIOR		in	into	out of
		DANS		DE

I. EXTERIOR:	The books are ON the table.	I put the books ONTO the table.	I took the books OFF the table
	Les livres sont SUR la table.	J'ai mis les livres SUR la table.	J'ai pris les livres DE la table.
II. NEUTRAL:	I am AT the station.	I went TO the station.	I left FROM the station.
	Je suis À la gare.	Je suis allé À la gare.	Je suis parti DE la gare.
III. INTERIOR:	He is IN the bus.	He got INTO the bus.	He got OFF (OUT OF) the bus.
	Il est DANS l'autobus.	Il est monté DANS l'autobus.	Il est descendu DE l'autobus.

[1] This chart is based on the work of J. C. Catford, "Contrastive Analysis and Language Teaching" in James E. Alatis, ed., Report of the 19th Annual Round Table Meeting on Linguistics and Language Studies, Georgetown University Press, 1968, pp. 170-171.

English verbs can change their meaning by adding a preposition (look AT, look UP, look FOR). Although the meaning of a French verb sometimes is changed by adding a preposition (chercher à, avoir à), generally speaking French has a separate verb for each action. If the student is aware of this it can help him to avoid errors such as "Je cherche *pour la jeune fille" and "Je regarde *à la jeune fille."

The categories of tense (expression of time), aspect (the indication of whether an action or state is viewed as completed or in progress), mood (the speaker's attitude toward an action) are extremely important to the language learner. A speaker chooses a particular tense, aspect, or mood depending on what he wants to say. Students should be made aware of the fact that they do have choices in language, some of which are obligatory (which language teachers sometimes overstress) and others that are optional. For example, the student is told that "Je travaille" is the equivalent of the English expressions "I work, I do work, I am working" as an aid to avoid the error "Je *suis travaillant." But the student should know that if he wishes to stress that 'the working' is presently in progress he may use the expression 'être en train de' - "Je suis en train de travailler." Students should be aware of the choices available to him to express future time other than the future tense (aller + infinitive "Je vais partir la semaine prochaine" and the present tense: "Je viens cet après-midi;" "Je pars dans 2 jours.")

The student needs to understand that the choice betweeen the passé composé and the imperfect tenses is a speaker's choice as to whether he is indicating a completed action (something that happened) or describing a mental condition, an existing situation, or a repeated action in the past. A speaker can also choose between the indicative and subjunctive moods depending on his attitude toward what he is saying - a neutral attitude would be expressed by the indicative mood and a hopeful or doubtful attitude would be expressed by the subjunctive mood. Students need to be made aware that several possibilities may exist for what they wish to express in the foreign language.

Anyone who has studied a language other than their native language knows that different languages classify and label the outside world in different ways. When you learn a second language you have to learn a different way of organizing and classifying your perceptions, i.e., the rules of the language system you are learning. In the foreign language classroom the presentation of material should encourage the formation of rules for the whole system of the language rather than the memorization of items. The student should be encouraged to take an active part in the formation of the rules for the language he is learning. I am not talking about a formal presentation or listing and memorization of grammatical rules. We, as teachers, should not be interested in a student's ability

to recite the rules that govern the language. We do want the learner to be able to use the language we teach him and to be able to extend his language ability to usage in new contexts, so that he can create new sentences that are appropriate for a particular situation. Therefore, we should teach the natural use of the language where sentences are taught in contexts that provide meaning and usability to learners, rather than teaching synthetic composition of sentences.

As teachers, we can put the language in a real context by creating situations in the classroom and having students act out roles in these situations. What we want to try to do is to create a situation where the student can see what various elements are needed to express an idea, to get the student to think about how the elements involved are put together and then to formulate his own rules about the construction needed to express his idea. Take, for example, the teaching of the causative faire construction in French. The teacher can ask the following series of questions which lead step by step to the causative faire construction. (Figure 8)

Teacher: Pierre, voulez-vous fermer la fenêtre? (répondez 'non'.)

Pierre: Je ne veux pas fermer la fenêtre.

Teacher: Alors, demandez à Marie de fermer la fenêtre.

Pierre: Marie, ferme la fenêtre, s'il te plaît.

(Marie ferme la fenêtre.)

Teacher: Pierre, qu'est-ce que vous avez fait?

Pierre: J'ai demandé à Marie de fermer la fenêtre.

Teacher: Classe, qui a fait la demande?

Class : Pierre a fait la demande.

Teacher: Quelle était la demande?

Class : Fermer la fenêtre.

Teacher: À qui a-t-il fait la demande?

Class : À Marie.

Teacher: Qu'est-ce qui est arrivé quand Pierre a fait sa demande?

Class : Marie a fermé la fenêtre.

Teacher: Est-ce que Pierre a fait fermer la fenêtre à Marie?

Class: Oui, Pierre a fait fermer la fenêtre à Marie.

Teacher: Pierre, qu'avez-vous fait?

Pierre: J'ai fait fermer la fenêtre à Marie.

Teacher: Classe, qu'est-ce qu'il a fait?

Class: Il a fait fermer la fenêtre à Marie.

Then, to expand this drill, ask the students to think of things they want other people in the class to do; have them do it; have them talk about what they're doing while they are doing it; and then ask the class to report on what happened. This drill can be expanded further by going through the series of questions and answers again, but this time have the students answer the questions replacing noun objects with pronoun objects. Thus, by actively using the causative faire construction in a meaningful context,

the student has to think about how the various elements are combined and formulate his own rules about the construction. The student is learning the function, meaning, and use of the causative faire construction by observing and actively taking part in its use in a meaningful situation.

In conclusion, I would like to state that although linguistic analysis is only indirectly useful for language teaching, it is directly useful to the language teacher. What we as language teachers hope to gain from linguistic studies are insights into the language and how it works and functions, so that we can make use of this information when formulating teaching techniques. With this knowledge in hand, a teacher can look for the best possible ways for a language student to pass through the various stages of language learning to the point where he can comprehend most of what he hears and reads in the foreign language, and can produce meaningful sentences in any situation when he speaks or writes the foreign language.

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